

MASON I've got a very interesting guest today. You know how recently we've been talking so much about Mark Lane's book Rush to Judgment, which has been sweeping the country. Just recently I heard of another book that had come out ahead of the Mark Lane book and that is even more intriguing, I think, because it's a little bit more from a layman's point of view, I suppose. It's written by a man who actually comes from Dallas, or nearby, and his name is Penn Jones, Jr. He's written a book called Forgive My Grief. I don't know exactly how to describe it--I think it is better to let him describe it, because he knows what his book is...You're a journalist, aren't you, by profession?

JONES Yes, I am. We own the Midlothian Mirror, a weekly newspaper located in Ellis County, 25 miles south of Dallas, and this is a compilation and addition to a series of articles which ran in my weekly newspaper, the Midlothian Mirror. I was interested in the case from the very moment it happened, as I was at the Trade Mart in Dallas, awaiting the arrival of the President to have luncheon, along with many thousands of newsmen, when the announcement came of the shooting. Two daily editors and I went to the hospital and remained there until the body left. Then we went to the assassination site and from almost that time I have been working, and it seems to eat up more and more of my time as time passes.

MASON Well, what did you feel? Did you feel from the very beginning that the whole story hadn't come out?

JONES Immediately after the assassination, of course, I knew nothing; but as the story developed over the two or three days it simply sounded too pat to me--this terrible tragedy, and then they caught him so rapidly, and another murder so rapidly, and everything was falling into place, so that it really didn't ring true. But of course we could not know that within a real degree of certainty until we had the testimony available to us that the Warren Commission provided. And from that, and from personal investigation in Dallas, I certainly do know feel that there were at least two riflemen, and therefore I feel that it was a conspiracy.

MASON Have you formed a conclusion as to who the conspirators were? or why it was allowed to be hushed up on so large a scale?

JONES I certainly do not have any conclusion as to who it was or really as to why it was hushed up. I think it is pretty audacious of a little weekly editor to come out and say flatly that he feels that it is a conspiracy, but those are my true feelings at this time, and I hope that I have kept my feet on the ground and tried to do a workman-like job in investigating and in reporting and in reading the voluminous testimony and the exhibits along with the Report.

MASON What would you say is the most important single thing that's come out of the inquiry that suggests it wasn't all that it was supposed to be?

JONES Well, I think the shortcomings of the Commission have been pretty well outlined by people like Mark Lane and Leo Sauvage and Harold Weisberg and all of those very important books. And they point out rather conclusively, I think, that talented men, headed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, made some fatal errors--and they must not be overlooked, they must be understood by the people of the United States. That's one of the reasons, I think, that all of us are writing these books--in order that we can get the American public to read the Report plus the testimony and exhibits.

You know, there were only 3,000 sets printed, and at this time less than 2,000 sets of those Hearings and Exhibits have been sold. So there probably are less than 200 people in the United States who are really familiar with the testimony and the exhibits. Of course, we are talking about 18,000 pages, over 10 million words, so it is a terrific task. But now I believe that the people must understand that the news was capsuled too much for us with the publication of the Report, which came out 4 months ahead of the testimony and exhibits. And now the American people, when they begin reading this testimony, are going to find out that that capsule we were given at that time may have been a rather poisonous dose.

MASON It seems to me that if there are all those millions of words it is quite possible that the people on the Commission themselves never read it, and never saw how it all put together.

JONES Yes, that's true. That's one of my complaints. I feel that the President was wrong in naming top-level Government officials who already were very busy men. I believe we would have had a more honest report if we had third-level Government employees who could have given their full time. The members of the Commission themselves did not attend enough of the hearings or enough of the meetings to get a coherent picture. They relied upon the staff, and the staff unfortunately let them down. Of course, the Commission cannot escape the blame for that, because any time that a ship is down or a battle is lost, the captain must bear the blame.

MASON Do you think there was a reasonable reason of any sort to want to hush it up or to want to just fluff over it? They had to make an inquiry, obviously, for the sake of world opinion--they couldn't just drop the whole thing in Dallas and say, oh, well, that was just too bad--they had to do a big expensive job on it. But do you think that from the very outset they never did intend to uncover what had really happened?

JONES Mrs. Mason, I can't answer that question. I've ~~and~~ not interviewed any of the Commission members or any of the staff really--that was done pretty well--as much as has been done--by Epstein in his book Inquest. But I feel from the things that continue to happen that there certainly was a conspiracy--I think that they got away with it, and I feel that they are continuing to kill, to keep this thing hushed up. In my book I listed 13 either murders or strange deaths that had taken place with people who had unusual knowledge or who had the opportunity to talk to either Ruby or Oswald alone, after they did their small part in history. And in my book--in fact, I believe that I'm about the only man that has listed--now, I'm listing up to 13 of these people and there are at least 5 others that I'm not yet ready to name, but I feel that they certainly were connected with the case. One reason I don't name one of them is that I have not yet informed the widow just how her husband was involved.

MASON They have not informed her, or you haven't?

JONES I have not informed her. She knows her husband's dead but I doubt very much if she knows the connection that her husband had with this case.

MASON Well, if you're right in that supposition, because I'd rather go along with you, that too many people disappeared or died too quickly afterwards to just be the normal course of events, to just be coincidences, it must have been a vast conspiracy, not just a little tiny neat between two or

three men conspiracy, an enormous conspiracy, of the type that overthrows a government.

JONES I certainly think that there were quite a number of people involved. There had to be a large number of people involved, and when I say there were two riflemen, I also feel that those two riflemen died that afternoon. I don't know who they were--but certainly in a case this large, this involved, those men had to die in a hurry.

MASON The same as Oswald had to...

(Station break)

JONES In my little shop there in Midlothian I have three full-time employees, so we're not a very big place. We printed 7500 copies and I have a friend, a librarian, who advised me ahead of time that we would sell 500 copies almost immediately, and then it would take 2 years to sell 2000 copies. We now are over 9000 in sales; I have a friend in Fort Worth who has printed another 15,000; and we will have another 15,000 as rapidly as he can get the job done. It outgrew our shop in a big hurry.

MASON I'm sure, because it is a very fascinating document. I notice that you have some of these quotations from various interviews there that I hadn't seen in any of the other books. How did you get it all? Did you read the whole of the Warren Commission's Report or did you get it in interviews that you made yourself?

JONES We made a few interviews, stumbling, before the Report came out; but when the Report came out, then we could start a real search. And then when the testimony came out we had slowed down until you could read most--I have not read all of the 18,000 pages--I guess I have read 90 percent of the testimony--and the reason you can't tell, really, is, some of it I read as much as 6 and 8 times--Lee Bowers, who was killed recently in Midlothian, I've read his testimony 6 times since his death. He was a very important witness who died just recently--in my home town.

MASON And what did he die of?

JONES He was driving along the highway at 50 miles an hour and his car drifted off the side of the road and into a bridge, and he died 4 hours later. We don't know what was wrong with him but certainly the doctors ruled out a heart attack--he was broken all to pieces but his heart continued to pump, for 4 more hours. One doctor said he was in some strange kind of shock, but that's all that he would say. We don't know why he died--as we don't know why a good many of the other people I have listed died; but Lee Bowers was the man in the railroad tower behind the assassination site, who saw two strange people behind the wooden fence from which other witnesses saw--heard the noise and saw a little puff of smoke at the time of the shooting. Lee Bowers was interrupted by the attorney when he was giving his testimony, before he was allowed to finish what he was going to say about these two men. And of course now he will not say.

MASON Do you have any theory yourself that they--whoever "they" may be, the mysterious "they"--may be after you also, or other people who are investigating the story?

JONES Well, I have had no threats...If I ever did learn enough to be--you know, I have characterized this thing as a vast tapestry with thousands of threads being woven into a picture, and these people like Ruby and Oswald, in my opinion, were very small people who probably had only one thread to put in place--but they were certainly, I feel, watched, to see that that thread went where it was supposed to be, at the time it was supposed to be. I'm in the same category: maybe I know where a few of those threads went, and if I ever did learn enough I might be a threat to somebody, but I don't think I'm that much of a threat yet.

MASON Well, the exposure of the various books that have exposed this very strong possibility that it was more than met the eye--in awakening the public to this knowledge, it makes it almost impossible for them to prevent its eventually coming out, surely, because although they may fiddle around for years fighting it off, the suspicion--I would say that probably about at least 50 percent of the public, if not more, are aware that there is a question about whether the Warren Commission was right or not, and at least 50 percent, probably more, believe that they were not right in the supposition that Oswald was the sole perpetrator...

JONES Mrs. Mason, during the Lincoln murder trials was the first time that shorthand was used--so that's the reason we have a more or less complete record of the murder trials, after the assassination of President Lincoln. Now, technology has advanced so much since then that I honestly feel--although the Warren Commission didn't take advantage of it--I believe that this thing can be solved in the years to come--I don't know when--but I believe that if all of the information in the 26 volumes were fed into a computer--we have computers now that can solve these problems--that's why we now know what Stonehenge was built for, over in England, thousands of years ago, because all the information that we know about it was fed into a computer, and it came up with the answer.

And I really believe that in the years to come--when, I certainly would not predict--that there will be enough information gleaned from the Report and testimony and exhibits, and from independent investigators like myself and Mark Lane and Harold Weisberg and others who--Maggie Field, right here in Los Angeles, a tireless worker on this case, along with Lillian Castellano, and Ray Marcus--although I had never seen Maggie Field until today I feel that I have known her all of my life because we spent so much time on the telephone with each other, and there are about 15 people that I know in the United States that are spending at least half of their waking hours... working on the Report, the testimony and exhibits, and independent investigations.

MASON I'm going to ask you what you think the Kennedy Family's position is in all this...(station break)...Forgive My Grief, incidentally, is rather a fascinating title. Where did you come by that?

JONES I'm so glad you asked. My younger son is a freshman at the University of Michigan and he is a language major. And he chose the title. It's from Tennyson--Alfred Lord Tennyson: "Forgive my grief for one removed, a creature whom I found so fair," I cried for weeks after the assassination...

MASON I still do, everyone thinks I'm so maudlin...

MASON I wanted to ask you what you felt that the Kennedy family position is in this, because I feel that they are trying to prevent one or two of the books that have come out from being--at this time, so far as I can make out --that don't want it at this time. I don't know what that means exactly.

JONES Well, neither do I. I am not in contact with the Kennedy family. I certainly did love President Kennedy. I can understand--as I read the article with regard to the Jim Bishop book, apparently Mrs. Kennedy seemed to be objecting to the title. If they are trying to prevent publication of books they will not succeed. As I said, I have not been in touch with any of the Kennedy family, but I would like to say this: Senator Bobby Kennedy has said that he had not read the report and did not intend to, and I'm hopeful that the family would continue to say that, and to stop right there. But regardless of how anyone feels, I think that some of us are going to prove that the Warren Report is fallacious to the point that it cannot be relied upon and I'm hopeful that the Kennedy family will never be in the position of saying that they endorse the Report or that they feel that a credible job was done, because a credible job was not done. I certainly don't blame the family for not reading it, and I hope they'll just say, we haven't read it, we don't intend to read it, and that's all.

MASON Somebody, I think it was in the Wall Street Journal, they reported that one of the reasons the family was against the exposure was because they feared for their lives, to some extent. They felt that if a massive inquiry--I suppose that so many people have been murdered already, then all of the Kennedy family could be in the line of fire.

JONES In order for me to believe that I'd have to see a direct quote. I don't think the Kennedy's are very...Mrs. Kennedy certainly didn't demonstrate any fear.

MASON No; I agree with you there. Somebody sent me that quote, actually, from the paper. I don't know what I did with it but I know I read it on the air--I probably lost it after that.

JONES We musn't be afraid--

MASON Oh, no, one mustn't be afraid, I agree with you, it's absolutely the very thing they're despising is cowardliness, isn't it, we can't possibly put up with it...

(Station break)

MASON Why, if all these other people have been bumped off--to put it crudely --how come they left Jack Ruby alive? Don't you think eventually something will happen to him in prison?

JONES Yes, but not in Dallas. Dallas has had all the killings they can afford for a while. I have said that Jack Ruby will be murdered, but it will be after he has been declared insane and moved out to some little insane asylum in Texas and there he probably will meet his doom. That's the way I feel about it.

MASON You don't think he'll see the light of day again--he'll never get out?

JONES No. He's not having a difficult time in jail, they're making it as pleasant for him as they can and he's got some friends on the police force that are still friends with him, and in the district attorney's office. But he's not going to see the light of day, and certainly I don't think that he will be executed in the legal manner, in Texas.

MASON No, because they've sort of goofed on that now, haven't they--letting it go so long and having goofed so much and putting so many questions in the way. What about the police department now? You've investigated them fairly thoroughly and I think you give a rather definite opinion...?

JONES Yes, I certainly think that the police are involved up to their necks in this. You can't have a prisoner who is chained to policemen, and 70 policemen standing around--you can't have him murdered, particularly by a man who is known to the police, whose record is known to the police, and who stayed in business at the whim of the police. He was continually licking the boots of the police and violating the laws to satisfy policemen in many ways, and when you have that type of man come in and kill the most important prisoner in the history of this country, then I don't see how you can absolve them.

MASON So that the police made Dallas look a pretty lawless town, really.

JONES Yes; one of my friends, Philippe Labro, the well-known radio and TV commentator in France, was present in the jail and saw the killing of Oswald and

he completely lost himself and screamed as loud as he could and said, "My God! Are we in the Congo, or where?"

MASON Somebody told me that the act of murder--passionate murder, so-called --usually, the normal person will hold a gun, point it toward somebody's head or heart, if you are about to try to kill somebody suddenly and on a whim. The paid assassin points downward into the stomach area because you are bound to hit a vital organ that way, which is the way that Ruby killed Oswald. He aimed, not at his face or heart, but into his vital organs.

JONES This wasn't an act of passion--Ruby did not love the Kennedys. I doubt very much if Jack Ruby ever voted in his life; and certainly he wasn't present to see the parade that day. He admits that he took some little pep pills which made him want to do positive things. He told his roommate and boy-friend, in quotes, that he intended to kill Oswald, and he did it in a very professional manner. It wasn't an act of passion.

MASON It was a planned performance?

JONES Yes, it was a planned performance.

MASON I'd like to know what those pep pills are--they sound rather good!

JONES I don't know either, but he described them as making you want to do positive things.

MASON That's good, it's uplifting.

(Station break)

MASON What do you think is the special contribution of your book to this whole inquiry?

JONES Well, I feel that I did a better job of defending Mark Lane against the statements of the Chief Justice--better than Mark Lane did. I suppose though the major contribution of my book is the fact that I am the one that has spent the most time investigating the peripheral murders and strange deaths--I'm about the only one that has listed this many of those deaths.

MASON I haven't read that chapter in the book, but are there any of them that seem to be normal or are they all weird?

JONES Well, yes, several of them could have been normal--Tom Howard, who died of an apparent heart attack--there are several of them who died of apparent heart attacks--but out of these 13 people there are only two who are in their sixties. One of them was killed right here in Long Beach, California, Bill Hunter was shot through the heart from what the papers said was more than three feet, in the police station in Long Beach, California.

MASON In the police station in Long Beach? Do you mean to say they're doing it all over the country now?

JONES And the significant thing about that is that there was a meeting at Ruby and Senator's apartment in Dallas, on the Sunday night, after Oswald was shot--there was a meeting with George Senator, Ruby's roommate, and three people who have died since that time were in that meeting--Bill Hunter; a Dallas Times-Herald reporter named Jim Koethe, and Tom Howard. And Hunter died on the very day--on the night, rather--that Senator "forgot" about this meeting in his apartment when he was testifying before the Warren Commission in Washington. He "forgot" about that significant meeting, that day; Bill Hunter died that night--across the nation, in Long Beach.

MASON Good heavens, that is a rather neat coincidence, to say the least.
(station break)

JONES May I say this--if you have any inclination to be a book collector, now is the time to buy the Warren Report, the testimony and the exhibits, the Index done privately by Sylvia Meagher in New York--and buy each of these books as they come out. In a few years this will be a very valuable collection, particularly the Report and the Hearings and Exhibits, because as I say, only 3,000^{sets} were printed.

MASON That's interesting! I am a collector, I don't feel I'll ever read those ten million words, but still, I'd like to. This has been awfully nice of you, I know you are in town only for a few days, but anyway I recommend you read the book, it is very interesting, I haven't had time yet to read it all but I will, I think it's something in the interests of the country and in the interest of honor and decency and all that stuff, and for all of us who were devoted to President Kennedy it would be a good idea to read Forgive My Grief.

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